

REMARKS

Applicant hereby requests further consideration of the application in view of the amendments above and the comments that follow.

Applicant hereby requests entry of the foregoing amendments, which place the application in condition for allowance or in better condition for appeal.

The Objection to the Drawings

Claim 8 has been cancelled by the foregoing amendments. Accordingly, Applicant submits that the objection to the drawings has been overcome.

Status of the Claims

The Action indicates that Claims 6 and 25-27 are allowed, and that Claim 24 stands objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. The remaining claims stand rejected under Sections 102, 103 and/or 112.

The Rejections under Section 112

Claim 9 has been amended to depend Claim 6. Claim 6 does not recite a single elongate portion. Claims 21 and 22 have been cancelled. Accordingly, Applicant submits that the rejections under Section 112 have been overcome.

The Rejections under Sections 102 and 103

The Action indicates that Claims 6 and 25-27 are allowed, and that Claim 24 stands objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form. Claim 24 has been rewritten in independent form as newly amended Claim 17. All of the remaining claims as amended depend from one of Claims 6, 17 and 25-27. Accordingly, Applicant submits that the rejections under Sections 102 and 103 are now moot.

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CONCLUSION

Applicant submits that the present application is in condition for allowance and the same is earnestly solicited. Should the Examiner have any matters outstanding of resolution, he is encouraged to telephone the undersigned at 919-854-1400 for expeditious handling.

Respectfully submitted,

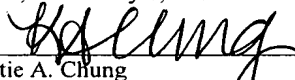


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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Mailstop AF, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450, on January 6, 2004.



Katie A. Chung
Date of Signature: January 6, 2004